

Yosemite National Park

Planning Update

Volume 5, Spring 1997

"No words will ever describe the exquisite beauty and charm of this mountain park -- Nature's landscape garden at once tenderly beautiful and sublime. No wonder it draws nature-lovers from all over the world."

John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra

Dear Friends of Yosemite:

Planning is moving faster than normal at Yosemite National Park! On March 21, I wrote you describing the various planning efforts underway related to both the General Management Plan and flood recovery. Now, we are releasing the draft Yosemite Lodge Development Concept Plan



Environmental Assessment for public review. In just a couple of weeks, another environmental assessment for permanent repairs of the El Portal Road (Hwy 140) will follow. Both projects are on a fast track following the January flood.

At the Lodge, some employee housing was literally swept away by the flood waters; the rest was inundated and remains unusable. About half the guest lodging -- 190 cabins and six lodge units -- were also damaged and most will not be available this year. As you are aware, we had known that we needed to move many of these facilities out of the Merced River floodplain. The 1980 General Management Plan (GMP), the 1992 Concession Services Plan (CSP), and the 1997 draft Yosemite Valley Housing Plan all called for relocating many of these facilities out of the floodplain. We had already put extensive work into three alternative concepts for doing this as part of our development of the draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan.

Since the flood, the public has repeatedly told us, "Fix it soon, and fix it right." It is prudent to do both. To quickly re-open all of the Lodge, following the direction of the GMP and CSP, we have decided to separate Yosemite Lodge planning from the Valley Implementation Plan and move a separate plan and environmental assessment forward in a more timely manner.

We are at the same time continuing our work on the Valley Implementation Plan, and will use it as our guide for much of the rest of the flood recovery effort. It will give detail to the General Management Plan's provisions

continued on the next page

The Draft Yosemite Lodge Development Concept Plan and other planning documents and Updates are available on the Internet via the Yosemite and National Park Service planning home pages:

www.nps.gov/yose/

and

www.nps.gov/planning/

or by calling (209) 372-0529 or 372-0265.

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Yosemite Lodge site tours, guided by park planners, will be held every Wednesday in April from 10 a.m. to noon; meet at the Yosemite Valley Chevron Station.

for Yosemite Valley and its goals. The Valley Implementation Plan will provide a detailed plan for removing buildings, roads, and functions from the valley, restoring lands, redesigning facilities, and improving circulation and in-valley transit. We hope to have the draft Valley Implementation Plan to you by May.

Meanwhile, rather than put effort and money into the repair of damaged structures at Yosemite Lodge, we have decided to move directly toward our long-term goal of replacing them in more appropriate places. In the planning process, we ordinarily work up several design options. However, I asked my staff to work with the various interested publics and concentrate on perfecting one good option to send out for public review. The proposed action represents the effort not only of our planning team, but also time given by various environmental, climbing, Native American, and recreational groups, Yosemite

Concession Services, and many of our own operational staff. I wanted to share with you some of the points made by these groups and the refinements we've made to the concept to bring us to this point. The accompanying table contains this information.



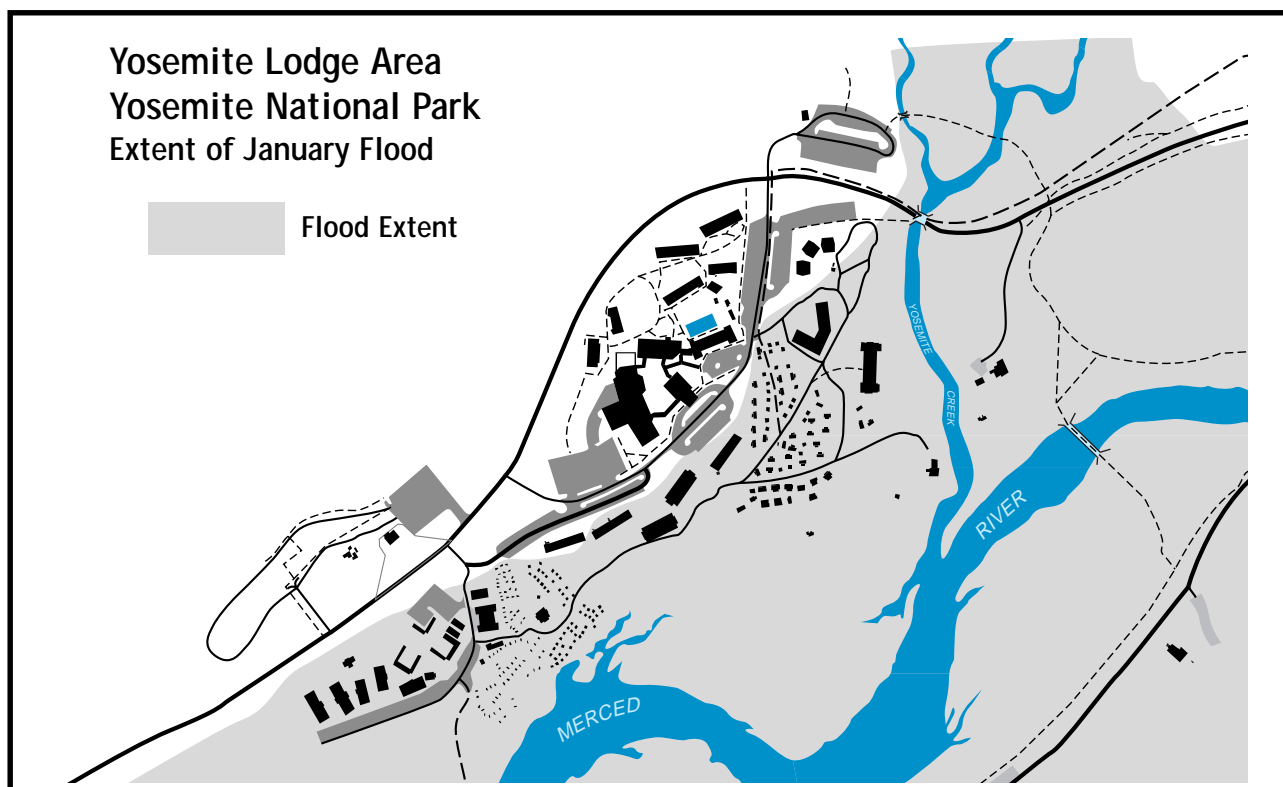
General Management Plan Goals

- ⊗ Reclaim priceless natural beauty
- ⊗ Reduce cars and congestion
- ⊗ Allow natural processes to prevail
- ⊗ Promote visitor understanding and enjoyment

Many of you have expressed a willingness to work with us on a short public review for the environmental assessment, so that we can begin work this construction season. We have also heard some apprehension about such a quick turnaround and have decided to use our customary thirty-day public review period. But, we will go ahead and assume some risk to keep the project moving quickly: we will begin some of our more detailed design work, knowing full well that we might need revisions after public review. The public comment period is open through May 9, 1997.

We look forward to seeing your comments.

B.J. Griffin
Superintendent



Concerns of Interested Groups and National Park Service Responses

Concerns

Changes Made to Plan

Climbing Groups:

- ☞ proximity of roads and structures to Swan Slab, a popular teaching and practice area for climbers
- ☞ placement of employee housing along the east side of Columbia Boulder, recognized as one of the world's foremost bouldering problems
- ☞ Sunnyside campground would be moved from its traditional Camp 4 location, or split
- ☞ there was desire to add improvements at the campground, commensurate with its significance to the climbing community

- ☞ a shuttle turnaround was moved to the west away from Swan Slab; the layout for hotel structures was tightened up and moved south; a pedestrian and bicycle path was moved further south
- ☞ employee housing moved to the current entry to Sunnyside Campground, the gas station site, and the Northside Drive road bed
- ☞ Sunnyside campground was left in its current location, with redesign as needed to place sites in a favored and previously used location just north of Columbia Boulder
- ☞ although they cannot be funded with flood recovery funds, we will work with the climbing community on the development of one or more small, roofed cooking pavilions, common in other international climbing areas

Native American Groups:

- ☞ Would like to have a buffer between the eventual Indian Cultural Center and Search and Rescue Camp (SAR-Site) in Sunnyside Campground

- ☞ Sunnyside's natural boundaries will be the small drainage running through the current SAR-Site; SAR-Site will be moved a few feet east or to another desirable location

Environmental Interests:

- ☞ footprint of lodging facilities
- ☞ relation to implementation of the GMP and CSP
- ☞ number of parking spaces

- ☞ lodging footprint tightened up, reducing amount of new development on the north side of the complex
- ☞ action will implement GMP's provisions to move facilities out of the floodplain and important riparian areas. The CSP's provision's for service levels will be implemented; this includes the reduction in lodging units from 495 to 440. Employee housing numbers will be consistent with the draft Yosemite Valley Housing Plan
- ☞ number of spaces in the Lodge complex will be reduced from current to accommodate only lodging guests, employees, and campers; restaurant guests, and visitors to Lower Yosemite Falls, Leidig Meadow, and other areas will walk or arrive via shuttle bus or bicycle

Others:

- ☞ loss of Pine and Oak Cottages, which are quaint, highly desirable accommodations for a segment of the public
- ☞ loss of cabin-like facilities, with an economy price structure

- ☞ some of the replacement cottage accommodations will be of a similar lodging style and will include many of the same design elements that have made Pine and Oak Cottages highly desirable
- ☞ fifteen quadplex (sixty units) economy price-range cabins will be part of the design; as per the CSP, the same percentage of all Yosemite Lodge lodging will remain economically priced

"New" Development Area

Moving facilities out of the flood-plain will result in the construction of lodging units in an area north of the present Northside Drive. But, this is not the first development in

that location. In 1915, the Yosemite Lodge was built on the site of the 1906 U.S. Army Camp in this area. Many Army buildings were adaptively used as lodging, including

"Army Row." Yosemite Lodge development gradually migrated to the southeast, and Army Row was demolished in 1958.

Map Sources:

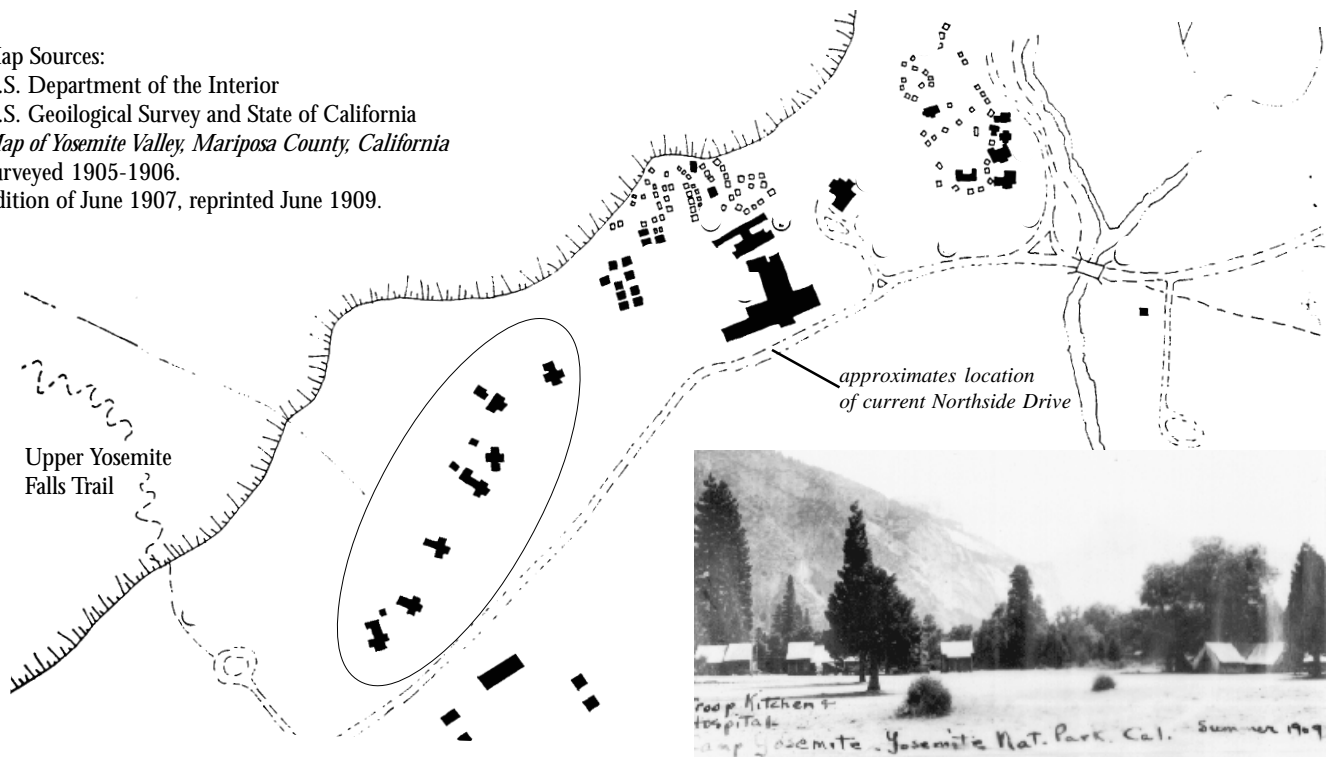
U.S. Department of the Interior

U.S. Geological Survey and State of California

Map of Yosemite Valley, Mariposa County, California

Surveyed 1905-1906.

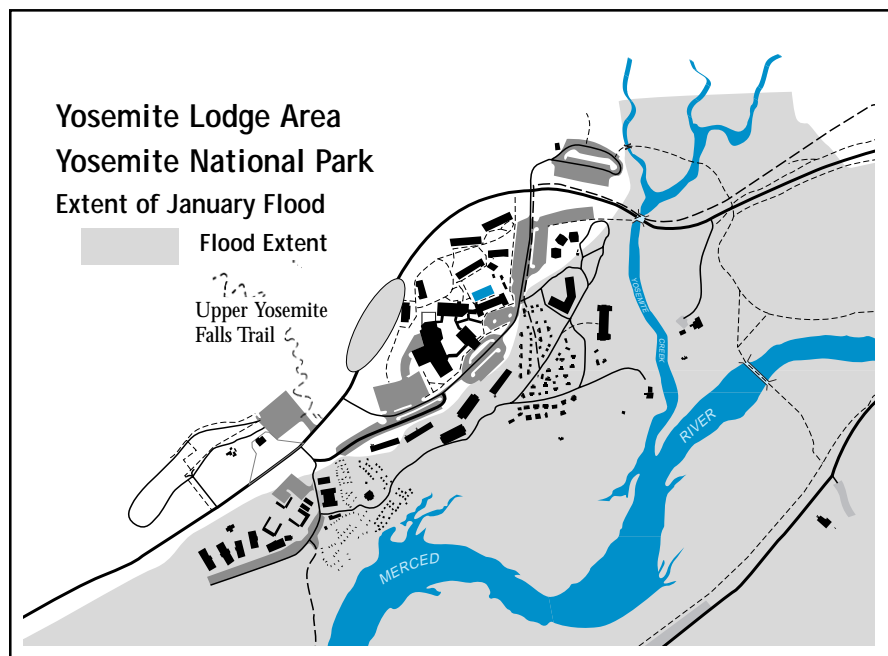
Edition of June 1907, reprinted June 1909.



Circled area above shows the location of "Army Row"

Photo shows typical buildings located in the cavalry development

○ Circled area below shows approximate location of "Army Row"



Comment via e-mail!

Comments on the draft Yosemite Lodge Development Concept Plan Environmental Assessment can be mailed to:

Yosemite Lodge DCP
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite National Park, CA
95389

Yosemite National Park is accepting comments via e-mail, on this document only, to facilitate the public review process. Decisions on acceptance of e-mail comments on future planning documents will be made after consideration of the Park's ability to adequately review and process the comments

yose_lodge_dcp@nps.gov

Highlights of the Draft Plan

The Draft Yosemite Lodge Development Concept Plan (DCP) has been developed following the specific direction of the Concession Services Plan (CSP), approved in 1992. The DCP does differ from the CSP, however, in that it relocates additional lodging units out of the floodplain, an action proven necessary by the January 1997 flooding. In the plan, duplex and quad lodging structures replace the removed cabins, the Alder and Hemlock motel units, and the Oak and Pine Cottages. The total number of lodging units will be reduced from 495 to 440, as called for in the CSP.

1 removes lodging and employee housing from the floodplain and important riparian areas; relocates guest parking to previously impacted areas on perimeter of Lodge area and screens from view

2 creates a vehicle-free pedestrian promenade in the middle of the Lodge complex; vehicle circulation will pass around the southern perimeter of the complex; relocates amphitheater and registration function, adapting current registration building to interpretive/information use

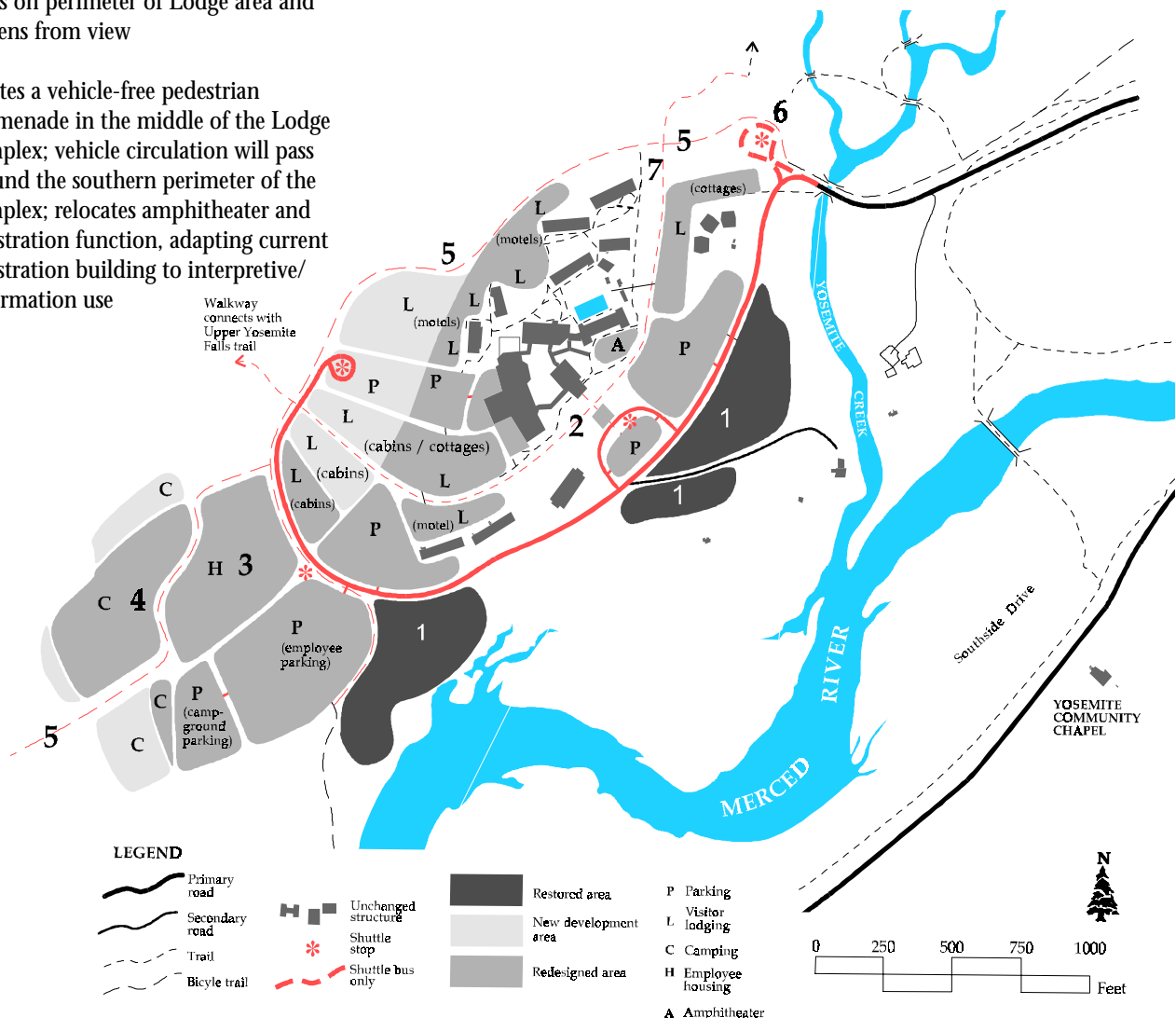
3 removes the public gas station from Yosemite Valley; moves employee housing to the current gas station/Sunnyside registration and parking location, and consolidates it into five dormitory structures; other employee beds (some lost at Camp 6 due to the flood) will be moved to these dorms, per the draft Yosemite Valley Housing Plan

4 Sunnyside Campground (Camp 4) remains in place, with the possibility of adding some design improvements to meet the needs of the climbing community, including a sheltered cooking pavilion; places registration and parking for the walk-in camp south of Northside Drive

5 integrates with the draft Valley Implementation Plan proposal of reducing Northside Drive between the Lodge and El Capitan Crossover to a single lane bicycle and pedestrian trail

6 removes the parking area from the Lower Yosemite Falls Trail site, and redesigns with a shuttle stop, interpretive displays, trails, and site restoration

7 ties bicycle and pedestrian trails to the Lodge complex, and links with the Lower Yosemite Falls area, Leidig Meadow and Northside Drive



What Does It Mean to “Restore the Floodplain?”

Moving the Yosemite Lodge facilities out of the floodplain will increase riparian (river related) vegetation and benefit the bird and amphibians that would normally live there. The goal will be to restore natural riparian processes.

The lowest areas of the floodplain will be inundated with water for several weeks each spring. There, sedges, reeds and horsetail will take hold, excellent amphibian habitat. Behind this, on the bank, alder, cottonwood, and willow may grow in a band five to twenty feet wide. These riparian trees will potentially support warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. On still higher ground, an area that floods infrequently, the upper bench will initially support a variety of grasses similar to those in Sentinel Meadow. Over time, oak and pine trees may take root here.

Over the next few decades the river will shift slowly north; a small amount of bank erosion is natural on the outside edge of a river bend. The bands of vegetation will shift with the river. Later, the river will reverse its actions and slowly meander back to the south. When it does, sand deposits and marshy overflow channels will remain. These old channels will flow during spring runoff and then become shallow ponds until they dry up in late summer. This is the natural riparian process, the continually shifting mix of overflow channels, ephemeral ponds, shady river banks, and hot sandbars. It is possible here only when the National Park Service works with the process, restoring to it its space in which to prevail.



Riverbank restoration at Devil's Elbow

Top: Before 1993 restoration

Bottom: Same area, two years after restoration



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